

Strange Effects

by SighingWinter

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Summary: Chizuru gets shot and the after effects are...interesting. This is a group of multiple oneshots- one for each of Chizuru's possible suitors. The suitors are- Okita, Hijikata, Saitou, Heisuke, Harada, Shimpachi, and Kazama. Please read and review!

1. Chapter 1

Strange Effects

In which Chizuru gets shot and things get interesting. This is a group of multiple oneshots- one for each of Chizuru's possible suitors. The suitors are- Okita, Hijikata, Saitou, Heisuke, Harada, Shimpachi, and Kazama. Read which ever you like, or read all of them but please don't forget to review!

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><p>Hello minna! Sorry it's been so long since I have updated any of my stories but I have been busy studying and planning for the next six months that are on their way! Yay college! Anyhow, I have gotten back into Hakuouki and this idea just hit me outta nowhere, and the result is this. Now I know that some of you might be saying at this point- WTF SW where are the updates for Healer Eleven? Well, I'm slowing working on it but things happen. I am still working on it so don't go worrying your pretty little heads.<p>

On to this! Now I know this is a weird story plot but I thought it was fun so no bashing my sleep deprived brain, okay?

****Major note: ****This is not a series. NOT A SERIES! It a two shot the first chapter and then the chosen character's chapter. Of you feel like reading them all fine, but I am telling you that you need to view each story after the first chapter as a separate story.**

While unfortunate I do not own Hakuouki or the characters within. I own nothing but the plot.

Enjoy!

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><p>CHAPTER ONE~ In which Chizuru gets shot and the Shinsengumi get pissed off and draw straws**

The snow had come sometime in the night, coating Kyoto with its purity. As the sun rose that morning, waking the ancient capital, it dyed the white snow red then slowly lightened until it seemed that the sun's light was coming from the snow itself. As the thousands of Kyoto's inhabitants woke and began to shuffle about during another snowy day there was a group a people who had been awake much sooner than the sun itself. These men carried in them the fire of their beliefs, a fire that had enthralled many in the past few years, and led to the deaths of hundreds. Today though, was special and all of these men struggled to repress their excitement.

"Today men, we destroy the Shinsengumi!"

Things were very different in a manor not too far from the river. As the slow sun rose so too did the members of that manor rise. Banners sailed in the faint breezes that swept across the city and danced through the streets, displaying to those few passersby that this manor was the headquarters of the Shinsengumi. By some of the city this group of samurai were known as thugs, to be feared and hated while to other inhabitants the Shinsengumi were heroes, fighting for the Emperor and the good of the land. Although if one looked into to these headquarters now, none of the civilians would have quite believed what it was they were seeing.

A young man, no older than seventeen stood in the kitchen surrounded by steaming pots and the remnants of sliced daikon and other vegetables. Rice was piled high into plain bowls that were somewhat worn from usage. These bowls stood as silent sentries, watching each new addition added onto their separate trays. Soon the young man with the large brown eyes and gentle hands was joined by a man with well-defined muscles, spiky brown hair, and light hearted blue eyes that shone as he looked at all the food.

"Looks like you out-did yourself again Chizuru-chan!" He said, rubbing his hands together in a childlike display of delight.

"Ah!" The young man's voice was high, as he turned and smiled warmly at the early morning visitor.

"Would you like some help carrying those?" Shinpachi asked, grinning ecstatically, as he thought of ways to tease Heisuke. Perhaps he could spike the kid's tea, or maybe the rice?

"Ano, Nagakura-san?" The ponytailed boy called, interrupting the immature thoughts of the older man, "If it wouldn't be too much trouble would you mind taking Kondou-san's and Hijikata-san's breakfast, I can carry the rest." He was aware of the old man's propensity for teasing the youngest Captain of the Shinsengumi and tried to do everything he could to subtly keep Heisuke's teasing down to a minimum.

"Eh? But a girl shouldn't have to carry all of that!" Yukimura Chizuru felt the desire to sigh but bit it back and smiled easily, as she reminded him that almost every day she carried all of the trays to their various recipients and that it wasn't any burden so long as she could be of some help.

The second unit captain sighed but did as asked. Soon he was talking cheerfully, mischief momentarily laid aside, as he and the young woman walked down the hallway to deliver the first meal of the day to the rest of the captains of the Shinsengumi. Everyone was already gathered, though a few were clearly still partly asleep, however when the food was served they all perked up and began to devour their food. The older members did so a bit more properly, while the two youngest and Kondou-san did so with great fervor. Chizuru sat quietly and ate observing the familiar face of the men that sat around her.

The main three were, as usual, sitting at the head of the room in a line with the leader of the Shinsengumi in the middle. Kondou Isami was a kind hearted man who brought those around him together, completing their bonds in such a way as to make them a family. It was Kondou-san who dealt with the precarious politics of their situation, taking care to ease any possible threat that came at their party through unhappy politicians. He seemed to Chizuru a father, who wanted nothing more than to help his Emperor and the people. He watched his leaders with a soft gaze, but sat with a silent dignity that led others to respect him and the quiet power he held.

On his right was the soft spoken Sannan-san, his round glasses flashing slightly in the combined light of the lanterns and sun. While a captain who is much respected, Sannan-san carried within him a great intelligence that was in constant use as he tried to figure out various aspects of the Rasetsu. While quiet there was something about his intense gaze that made Chizuru uncomfortable, and secretly she was glad at the limited amount of contact she had with him.

The long haired Hijikata Toshizo, sat on Kondou's remaining side, his brows already in their furrowed position. As his short span of patience for Heisuke and Shinpachi's childish behavior lessened, he gripped his chopsticks harder until at last they snapped. The duo had yet to notice the warnings of the lieutenant's sparking irritation and continued their argument. Chizuru sighed and quietly left walking down the hall just in time to hear his voice yelling at the two captains. When she returned with a new set of chopsticks he nodded his thanks and went back to eating with slow deliberation. Dark violet eyes steadily observed everyone, noticing every minute change. Out of all the people gathered Chizuru often found him the most capable to lead; even Kondou-san turned to his younger subordinate when there was an unexpected situation that Sannan-san had yet to anticipate or analyze.

Okita Souji sat closest to Hijikata today, his casual seating style belying the power that he held hidden under loose clothes and lithe body. His sharp green eyes were currently paying attention to the latest victim of his sharp sarcastic wit, which happened to be Shinpachi this morning. His sword rested beside him, close enough to grab and draw if there happened to be any trouble. Unlike the others the first unit captain, Okita seemed to hide behind various faces, often smiling when upset or toying with those who had had the

misfortune of upsetting him or insulting the man he respected most. Chizuru ate some more of her breakfast in order to hide the smile that tugged at her lips, as she recalled other somewhat gentler sides of the man.

Across from him was Saito, a living enigma. His hair was, as usual, unkempt and tied over one shoulder. Although Chizuru knew he liked swords and that he defined his being off his swordsmanship, she knew little else about the man. He seemed to enjoy the snow and carry ideals not dissimilar to those of the Shinsengumi. There were times when he smiled warmly, mostly when others weren't looking, and times when he sighed over the antics of his fellow cohorts. She knew that he cared for them, but he rarely ever displayed it openly, if at all. For brief moment Chizuru watched as he ate his rice with slow but elegant deliberation and she wondered where it was Saito-san had come from.

Beside Saito-san was Heisuke who frowned down at the near emptiness of his food. He had tried to steal from Shinpachi but the older man had stolen more from him than he had stolen from the older man. Chizuru sighed and mentally made a note to bring him a small snack between lunch and breakfast. The young man with his bright eyes so full of openness and excitement, and his long brown hair that was always in a high ponytail seemed to brighten at some thought or another and soon he was once again eating heartily. Heisuke acted like a child more often than not, even on patrol he seemed more like an apprentice than anything else, but whenever there was some kind of problem his maturity skyrocketed, sometimes giving people whiplash at how fast he could change. He was quick to recover, easy going and friendly, much like those he was most often seen with. Perhaps that was how he had become the person that he was, by being around Shinpachi and Harada. Maybe it was because he aspired to be like one of those men that that was why he wasn't serious often or teasing. His exuberance was of a young man just forming his ideals and seeing just how large the world really was.

Chizuru finished her breakfast and began to pick up the various trays, receiving silent nods of appreciation from others along with loud tanks from two people. Having picked up the leader's trays first she turned only to find Harada-san walking out of the room with all the other trays. Calling after him, Chizuru almost forgot to close the sliding door behind her, but a quick step and slide later she was speed walking after the warrior protesting his carrying the trays.

"It's alright. You were quiet during breakfast so I thought I'd help out since you seemed a bit tired." The tall man said easily, smiling down at her.

Chizuru stopped to blink then smiled and happily chirped her thanks.

With that out of the way, Sanosuke Harada began a conversation, starting off with his compliments on breakfast and recommending foods for lunch and dinner. That was the wonderful thing about the tall spear wielding red head, he seemed to always be so relaxed and content that no matter who it was that he spoke to they always felt equal and relaxed. Unlike the other officers he always seemed to be comfortable with himself. He always had a smile for anyone who passed by, and perhaps a kind word or two. Which is probably why he's so

famous in the brothels and drinking houses of Kyoto, Chizuru mused. Along with that thought came a question that had often followed any thought related to the tall man. Why wasn't he married?

Then again that question could be asked for anyone of the Shinsengumi. All of them were handsome and while it was most certainly true that they had taken many lives they were just as responsible for saving lives. Chizuru let her thoughts carry on, as she washed dishes and trays. They were a group of rounin, which meant that money might be an issue or maybe it was because they were so well known that a wife and children could become targets for those who wished them harm. A long sigh escaped Chizuru's lips, her open expressions often following with her varying thoughts.

"Anything I can help with?" Harada asked, making the girl yelp and send soap suds flying. Harada covered his grin at the young woman's shock with a large hand, which did nothing of course to hide his amber eyes that sparked with laughter. In truth he hadn't left as soon as the trays were placed safely on the counter, but rather he had stayed leaning on the door frame, watching as Chizuru lost herself in her thoughts. The expression of worry, flowed by irritation, then puzzlement, then sadness had done some pretty strange things to his emotions. He and the others had seen her lost in her thoughts only one time before and that had the precursor to a cold. Although they all knew that the young woman had a tendency to fret over them the Shinsengumi did try to ease her reasons to worry.

"I-i-iiie. I'm almost done, so there's really no need to help." Chizuru's quiet voice made the man smile softly and lay a hand on her head.

"I didn't mean it in that sense. If you ever need to talk, the offer still stands." With that the spear wielder left the kitchen and returned to the officers meeting.

Taking his usual place near the back of the room, Harada closed his eyes and waited for the meeting to start. When several minutes passed he looked up to find multiple gazes on him.

"Is Yukimura-kun alright?" Kondou asked the slight lines of age on his face more prominent as he expressed openly, his worry for the young woman.

Realizing that the others had also seen the strange acting Chizuru and had worried about her made the man smile, and he offered reassurance that she was just thinking too hard.

"Heh? So she's actually using her head?" Okita teased, releasing his emotions with a normal careless remark.

"Souji!" Hijikata called his friend to order, his sharp tone and furrowed brows more than enough to call attention back to the reason for this early meeting.

Slight tension filled the air as all eyes diverted towards Sannan-san who began speaking. "As I am certain you are aware, the Rasetsu have become more numerous in the city. Although Yamazaki has yet to find out why or how, it is certain that these Rasetsu are somehow managing to come into the city from elsewhere."

Kondou continued his strong voice projecting, "Already many innocent lives have been taken and it is time that this is stopped."

Questions floated to the forefront of many of the minds of the officers but none were voiced, as they waited for their leader to continue.

"Tonight all of us will work together to finish off these Rasetsu."

Eyes widened in surprise, and even Saito seemed shocked by the news. Certainly two or sometimes three captains ended up patrolling together, but never all of them at once.

Hijikata looked at his fellow captains his gaze strong, "Two other patrols with continue on their regular rounds, on order not to interfere."

"But-" Shinpachi's voice was cut off by Hijikata's sharp eyes and voice as he pronounced the words that hadn't been said in a very long time.

"We are warriors Shinpachi. At any moment we could die, and the others in our patrol units must have the ability and experience enough to step up and lead. If we do not force them to lead when we are alive, they will all be slaughtered when we are cut down by a well-placed strike."

The air sobered as the men looked to the ground. They hadn't forgotten that they could die at any moment, but those words had never been said aloud. It was the thought that plagued every one of them, the thought that was never addressed, for fear of what that would bring upon them and their ranks.

Shinpachi was the first to return to reality, surprisingly, "And what about Chizuru-chan? I promised to take her out on my patrol tonight ."

Sannan-san looked towards Kondou who rubbed his chin in thought. The tension in the air was thick, and just as Kondou was about to tell the rest that the girl could not come along the door slid open, bringing with it a cold winter breeze and the smell of hot tea. The very topic of the conversation smiled at everyone and walked into the room, placing a tray of hot tea on the floor as she knelt and closed the door behind her. The warm liquid thawed the tension and the warriors relaxed somewhat.

"Yukimura-kun." Kondou looked at the young woman, a pensive look on his face.

"Hai?"

"Tonight myself and the other men here will be going out on a new patrol route. It will be very dangerous and none of us will be able to guarantee your safety if you decide to join us." His voice was very serious as he pronounced his verdict.

"If it's not too much trouble, I would still like to join you. I will

do my best to help and not be in anyone's way so please allow me to join!" She bowed and the air relaxed. Smiles spread across more than one face in the room, and as Chizuru returned to her sitting position a little red faced light laughter spread through the room.

The morning blended into afternoon which in turn blended into twilight, and all too soon the group of captain Shinsengumi were on their way. Blue and white robes shifted against the fabrics of their hakamas, lit by the presence of an orange half-moon, which lightened as it rose higher into the sky. Snow fell from the sky in light waves, joining the earthbound snow that lay piled on the ground. There were no lanterns to light the way for the odd group of Shinsengumi, just the moon. Once or twice Saito and Hijikata, who led the party rushed off, coming back minutes later with the edge of their robes stained red. All senses were on alert. This wasn't the first time a patrol had been like this but it never failed to make Chizuru nervous. A small bag of bandages and medicine rested on her back, providing a little reassurance. Beside her Okita walked calmly, a smile on his face that seemed almost sly.

The night air was silent, no horrible screams, no cries of war, just the low breathing of the wind and the dim crunch of snow beneath sandaled feet. Suddenly a blast of wind came from behind announcing the sound of stalkers. As one the patrol turned swords drawn, as a group of men silently rushed forwards their weapons drawn and aimed to kill. Okita pushed Chizuru into the protective shadows of a nearby house and she watched in avid horror as the sight and sounds of battle clawed through the night.

More of the attacking men came, and that's when the gunshots sounded. The wood not too far from where she crouched in hiding splintered as a high speed bullet tore through, hungry for flesh. Chizuru covered her mouth with both hands to prevent her cries of fear from escaping. She saw Okita look for the shooters during a short lull in the fighting, but soon his green eyes caught the danger Kondou-san was in and he rushed to his beloved leader's aid.

Saitou and Hijikata fought back to back, protecting one another as well as working together to kill more of the attacking party. Not too far away Harada, Shimpachi, and Heisuke fought in a whirlwind of destruction fending off attacks to their friends while competing over something. The roar of battle came to a crescendo and yet more gunfire split the air. A voice- Okita's- she realized cried out in obvious pain and large eyes desperately searched for the owner. He was alive but on the ground his thigh bleeding. Another wound bled profusely from his side.

"SOUJI!" Kondou cried, fighting in earnest to reach the side of his vassal. Two gun men grinned, allowing themselves to part from the protection of the shadows and approach the fallen warrior. They reloading their guns at a safe distance and took careful aim. The first to fall would be one of the Shinsengumi's finest.

"NO!" Kondou roared, catching the other's attention to what was about to happen. The other officer's eyes widened in horror and they struggled even harder to prevent the inevitable. Okita stared at his would be killers, memorizing their faces with deadly intent. Then several things happened, that would only ever happen in the fast paced dance that defined battle.

Harada took the greatest of dares and threw his prized weapon towards one of the men, leaving himself open just long enough to be lightly wounded by an enemy's katana. Saitou threw to short sword stolen from the body of one of the fallen enemy, immediately killing a man who tried to cut Hijikata down from behind. And Chizuru rushed from her hiding spot and stood in front of Okita just as the two gunmen fired. But as their fingers squeezed the trigger two weapons hit their bodies, throwing their aim off and upwards.

Chizuru had not thought of anything more than saving a friend, of letting him live just that much longer. She had no time to move, and Okita's eye widened in horror as her small body bore the brunt of what was supposed to be his injury. She stumbled back then fell forwards, hitting the cold hard ground with sickening thump mere feet away from him.

For a moment time seemed to halt, in remembrance for the life wasted in sacrifice. The eyes of the Shinsengumi had turned as the gunfire sounded and widened in shock at what they saw.

Heisuke let out a pained cry of the girl's name and leapt into action, wanting nothing more than to kill the bastards that had destroyed the life of his friend. Shinpachi and Harada turned savage tearing at any who got in their way, while Saito, Hijikata, and Kondou struggled to keep their thoughts clear though pure anger sang in their veins. As for Okita, he could do nothing but stare at the body of the girl who had placed his life before her own.

One of the men who had so abruptly ended her life lay on the ground, Harada's spear in his belly. The other snarled and tore Saito's blade from his right shoulder, eyes fixed on the target he had failed to kill once. With deliberate steps he drew his katana and walked towards Okita Souji, the man who had killed his teacher and older brother. Kicking aside the body of the boy who had thwarted his plans he advanced raising the sharp weapon high.

The sound of Chizuru's body being kicked aside like a rag doll made the browned haired man snap out of his shocked daze and the green eyes of the demon that was Okita Souji locked onto his aggressor. In a blinding movement the blade he held clenched in his hand went up as he stood, ridding the man of both his hands. The man screamed in pain.

"And now your legs you sonofabitch."

The man died screaming with Okita standing over him and soon the sounds of battle ended, with the Shinsengumi once more victorious. None dared to look at the fallen figure, knowing that what they would find was going to be inescapable. The sound of a blade tearing into flesh repeatedly drew the attention instead, it was Okita. Fanning out behind him the Shinsengumi captains watched as he took out his sorrow and rage on an already dead man. At last Kondou stepped forwards and placed a gently hand on his subordinate's shoulder.

"That's enough Souji. He's dead." His voice was soft and gentle, parent-like. Okita turned to look at his mentor, to look at the man he admired above even the gods. Green eyes burned with a wild swirl of emotions that were nothing Kondou had ever seen before.

While all of this happened Harada walked over to the man his spear had killed and pulled out the weapon from the man's gut. As he walked back he stopped by the body that was once Yukimura Chizuru, and turned it over, his hand never once touching skin. Her large eyes were closed and she looked for the entire world like she was asleep and at any moment would open those expressive eyes and smile at him, accompanied by her voice telling him that she was alright. The most ardent wish of his mind would have worked, had it not been for the dark red blossom that bloomed over her heart.

"It was quick at least." Saito's calm voice by his ear first mad him tense, but then slowly he nodded.

"Ah." Harada shrugged off his stained robe, and with a silent apology to Chizuru's spirit wrapped it around her body.

Saito's arms reached out and picked up the limp body, holding it delicately as though it was more than an empty shell. He gently tucked its head against his shoulder and walked over to join the others. Shinpachi, observing his best friend still kneeling in the snow put a hand on his shoulder and gave it a quick squeeze. Harada took a deep breath and then swiped his hand over the dyed snow, covering it once more with white. Then he stood and walked back to the headquarters with the rest of a very silent patrol.

As they returned towards the building that they called home, several Rasetsu attacked. The Shinsengumi did no more than blink before Okita and Heisuke had them slain. It was during one of these brief moments that Saito jerked to a halt, an expression of utter shock on his face.

"Hajime-kun?" Kondou asked, uncertainly looking back. The rest of the party gazed at him too, wondering what the hell could be going on to make this evening drag on endlessly.

Abruptly the silent swordsman bent towards the ground and removed Harada's robe, and put his ear to the girl's chest. The other averted their eyes, pained at the sight of the flower in the girl's clothes. Then he looked up at his leader with wide eyes, "Her heart still beats."

"That's a bad joke Saito." Shinpachi said eyes downcast.

"What?" Hijikata demanded, slight worry for his friend tingeing his conscience.

"She is still alive. Her heart is beating." Hajime Saito was never one to repeat his words, he had never found it necessary, but now all he wanted to do was say those words over and over again. In a single moment the leaders of the Shinsengumi shared and look and rushed into action.

"Heisuke get Dr. Matsumoto to the headquarters!" Kondou-san ordered. The youngest of their troupe nodded and sprinted off, daring to hope that Chizuru would be alright.

The rest began running back towards their home, hurrying as tough the very fate of the world rested on this simple task. Sannan-san stood at the entry way to welcome them back, but on seeing the blood and injuries as well as the figure that Saito carried in his arms the

smile of welcome shifted to one of concern.

"She alive, but we don't know for how long." Kondou-san said, stopping in front of the glasses wearing warrior. "Dr. Mastumoto will be coming in along with an assistant or two and Heisuke, let him through and guide him to Yukimura-kun's room immediately." Then the older man rushed after his subordinates, worried as the rest.

Dr. Matsumoto joined the Shinsengumi and quickly dismissed all the men from the room, ordering Heisuke to pull out another futon, and several heavy blankets, and one of them to boil water. Heisuke quickly rushed about the room, hearing the sound of fabric being cut and removed from Chizuru's body. Not looking he laid out the futon and the blankets and exited to go and wait with the others who were getting their wounds tended by one of the assistants that joined the doctor. Shinpachi walked into the room a few minutes later, having delivered the hot water. The assistant's work was swift and accurate; leaving to help his teacher only after every injury was properly cleaned and bandaged.

That night was the longest those men had ever witnessed. Not a single eye removed itself from the sliding door, though fatigue weighed heavily on their shoulders. The unspoken fear of what would happen if they slept kept them up until at last, as the sun began to rise over the horizon, the sounds of the doctor's footsteps walking down the hall reached their ears. All the men in the room looked at the bald doctor, who by all rights looked exhausted.

Sannan-san silently handed the worn man lukewarm tea, which he drank gratefully. The silence stretched as the man revitalized himself somewhat. At last Kondou-san could bear it any longer and asked the question, "How is Yukimura-kun doing?"

Putting his empty glass on the floor Mastumoto answered him quite seriously, "Neither of the two bullets pierced her heart. She has lost a lot of blood and she will need rest. You must keep a careful watch over the next few days, for that will be when she is at her weakest. If she should become sick in that time period, she will not survive. For now all I can prescribe is rest. When she has awakened please send a message to me as soon as possible."

"Of course." Kondou-san replied and with much thanks he stood and led the good hearted doctor and his assistants out of the Shinsengumi headquarters. When he returned to the room, he dismissed the men, telling them that they could visit Chizuru later. The protests that rose were quickly and efficiently quieted when Heisuke said that Chizuru wouldn't want them to worry and would want them to get their rest. The rest of that day found the leaders catching up on their sleep and in between short awake periods worrying over the young woman who slept isolated in her room.

For the next few days patrols were seen without their captains leading, but eventually Hijikata set his foot down and routines returned, with an additional one. Whoever went on patrol got to visit Chizuru and the rest had to wait until their patrol in order to see the sleeping girl.

It was Sano and Shinpachi who were the last to see her before things took a turn for the worst. Sano ended up visiting the girl by himself as the bandana wearing warrior claimed the need to drink that night.

In the dark of her room Sano sat beside the sleeping girl and he recounted to her the tales of the day, how Shinpachi had had his head in the clouds and slipped in mud, how Heisuke had messed up breakfast and Hijikata couldn't make a good dinner. He smiled down at the unresponsive body, and lightly reached out and brushed her bangs away from her forehead. "You wake up soon Chizuru-chan, okay?"

With those words he left the room. No one saw the shadow that slipped into the room mere moments after the warrior left. Red eyes gazed at the small figure that laid underneath a blue futon. Kazama Chikage frowned and knelt beside his fellow demon, a calloused hand raced out and hovered over the girl's head, and his eyes closed in concentration. At last the hand pulled away and rested in his lap, as he frowned down at the female oni. Pulling the covers away just a little he pulled aside her seeping dress to peer at the wound. It was festering.

"Stupid humans." He muttered pulling the clothes and covers back, "They'd as soon as kill her." He grumbled to himself for a moment, debating his next move. While it would not be beneficial in any way to create a bond between the sick woman before him, it would definitely be a problem if she died.

"You better be grateful for this!" He muttered before biting into his wrist and putting it at her mouth. After a few moments he pulled his healed wrist away and wiped the blood off on his clothes, then gently dabbed away the blood from her face. Not once did the woman stir, which told the demon just how far gone she really was. For the first time in a very long time Kazama sent a prayer up towards the gods, asking for the woman to be spared. Light footfalls sounded from down the hallway and Kazama stood. The door slid open and violet eyes scanned the room and the only person within before nodding to himself and walking away.

The next morning Chizuru was flushed and tossed restlessly, her movements weak. Kondou-san was the first to send someone to alert the doctor, when he happened to hear a noise and find that the girl sweating and pale. Word spread like wildfire throughout the Shinsengumi headquarters and soon all the leaders were once again waiting; only this time it was outside her door. When Dr. Mastumoto exited the room he looked saddened.

"The fever has a strong hold on her. There is nothing more I can do at present." The doctor was installed in a guest room nearby, should there be any need for assistance. For the first part of the day Heisuke sat beside the ill girl, whispering to her quiet urges, reassuring both her and himself that she would be okay. Outside the leaders of the Shinsengumi could go nowhere without being reminded of the girl in some way.

Shinpachi passed by the kitchen and slid open the door and for a short moment he thought he saw Chizuru standing there slicing daikon. He stepped forwards with a grin only to see the kitchen empty and pristine. For a long while the man stood in that kitchen a hand on the sturdy wooden table.

Saito glimpsed her figure in his private training spot, which happened to be where she washed clothes. The wind blew snow in his face and when his eyes opened her ghostly presence was gone, no sign of her existence remaining. For the first time in a long while Saito

found he had no energy or desire to slide his sword out of its sheath and train.

When Harada went on patrol that afternoon he paused, telling the men to go on as he gazed at the empty seats of the closed dango shop. For a moment he thought he saw Chizuru sitting there smiling and laughing only to blink and find that it was the sun and snow playing with his mind, so the man did his best to move on, but he could not do so without looking back.

That evening as he wrote reports Hijikata thought he heard her soft voice accompanied by the sliding of his door. Turning his head to look the man with violet eyes saw nothing and rubbed his eyes, muttering lowly about candlelight and working for too long.

Unlike the others though, Okita suffered the most. Everywhere he went there was always something to bring his thoughts back to the sick girl who was, quite possibly dying. Everywhere he looking it seemed as though there was some memory his mind had of the girl.

Had it been any of the others she had sacrificed herself for, their minds would have been haunted in the same way, for is that not how the human mind works? To suffer and wrack itself with guilt over the death of someone close.

When Okita's turn came around to watch over the girl, he silently sat by her bed, watching as sweat beaded at her forehead, and she tossed restlessly. The irony stung, here he was the man who was slowly dying every day and there was the girl who had done everything in her power to help him live just a day or two longer. His lifespan was short, whereas hers- hers ought to be long and filled with goodness, rather than the hate and bloodshed she was forced to live through.

"Don't you dare die Chi-zu-ru-chan or I'll kill you in the afterlife."

Good news came in the form of Shinpachi, three days later when he burst into dinner with bright news. "The fever's broken!"

Grins eased the signs of strain that had befallen their troupe and cheers echoed through the hallways. Dr. Mastumoto entered the room, and started as he saw the speed in which the Shinsengumi were eating. Shinpachi and Heisuke finished first and rushed towards the door determined looks on their faces. His entrance was soon noted and Shinpachi happily told the older man that they were going to see Chizuru.

Dr. Matsumoto looked down at the Shinsengumi, and they shuddered seeing the look in his eyes, "No."

"EH? Why the hell not?"

"Heisuke watch your tongue. Is that how you so your thanks to the doctor?" Hijikata demanded

Heisuke grumbled under his breath as Kondou-san rubbed the back of his head, apologizing to the doctor, "Although," he added afterwards, "I would like to know why we can't see Yukimura-kun."

Dr. Mastumoto sat down in Chizuru's normal spot, and Sannan-san

briefly thought of how sad it was that this man had not continued his career as a samurai. The way he sat and used his authority, he would have made a very useful leader. 'Chizuru-chan is very weak at the moment and- forgive my frankness- there are simply too many of you. Your presence at such an early stage of her recovery could, possibly, send her into a relapse. For now, I will say this, one visitor for the next few days- the same visitor.' He smiled in thanks at the young man who placed breakfast in front of him and then began to eat, allowing his temporary employers to digest what it was he had said.

"When I return to checkup on her, I will determine if she can handle more." He said, after finishing off the meal.

"Ah. Of course. Please excuse our rudeness, you have our gratitude for all that you have done for us." Kondou-san said as he and the doctor left the room.

Now allow me to inform you, dear reader, of the animosity filled the air. Almost every man glared at one another, silently declaring that he was to be the one to see Chizuru first, by almost I mean the Saito-san's face showed his displeasure by a frown, and Hijikata-san's face looked frustrated though it was more because of the immaturity level of his fellow officers and friends.

The argument that broke out, was quite grand, I assure you. In fact it was on such a scale and there was such a general announced level of discontent that it was quite possible that the Shinsengumi would split over the idea that one man would be able to see the young woman for an extended period of time without the others being in immediate attendance nearby.

"THAT'S ENOUGH!" Hijikata's voice called, drawing the attention of the loudly arguing bunch, "If you keep up like this you'll disturb the whole manor with your childishness!"

"But Hijikata-san-!" Heisuke cried out.

"Straws." Sannan-san said, closing his eyes as he smiled at the faces that turned towards him at his simple sentence.

"What?" Hijikata asked, looking that the man with something akin to confusion.

"We can all draw straws, and whoever has the shortest one will get to be the one who visits Yukimura-kun." This rather simple idea left most in the room astounded and silent. Sannan-san left the room, and fetched the items. While he enjoyed the childish behavior of his cohorts he was very much ready for life to return to normal so he could get on with his research. Returning with the items he sat in the middle of the room, and watched as one by one the men drew their fate.

2. Okita Side Pt 1

Strange Effects

In which Chizuru gets shot and things get interesting. This is a group of multiple oneshots- one for each of Chizuru's possible

suitors. The suitors are- Okita, Hijikata, Saitou, Heisuke, Harada, Shinpachi, and Kazama. Read which ever you like, or read all of them but please don't forget to review!

* * *

><p>Major note: **This is not a series. NOT A SERIES! It a two shot the first chapter and then the chosen character's chapter. Of you feel like reading them all fine, but I am telling you that you need to view each story after the first chapter as a separate story. **

While unfortunate I do not own Hakuouki or the characters within. I own nothing but the plot.

Enjoy!

* * *

><p>Chapter Two - In which Okita Finds Something Unexpected and Learns Something New**

As the men all nervously revealed their straws to one another, Okita looked down at the one that rested in the calloused palm of his hand. In all honestly it had looked to be the largest yet somehow he had managed the get the smallest. He didn't even need to see the other's straws to know that. Within his chest there swarmed a number of feelings that he couldn't place, and the man wasn't certain he wanted to see the face of the girl whom he owed his life to.

"What the hell, Sannan-san!" Shinpachi's loud voice, shook the green eyed man out of his thoughts and he looked up to find that they hadn't been able to determine whose was shortest so they had lined them up.

"They're all the same size, you jerk! You just wanted Chizuru all to yourself!" Heisuke yelled standing as he pointed to the older man. Hijikata sighed as he saw the glint in his intellectual friend's gaze.

"But I don't have a straw, and besides there really is a short straw, but only one. It would have been boring to waste time debating. Am I correct in assuming that Okita-san is the one with that straw?"

Okita jerked as eyes turned towards him, and he made a silent vow to pay Sannan-san back for the angst that surrounded him. Instead he leaned back against the wall, swords resting against his shoulder as he grinned up at the rest and held up the pinky sized straw, "Mah, looks like I win."

Hijikata sighed, drawing Okita's eyes towards him. Okita had to grin at the expression that filled his closest friend's face, mixed with exasperation and pity as it was, made it an interesting expression for the lieutenant of the Shinsengumi. "Take the girl her breakfast Souji."

Never one to directly disobey orders Souji stood grinning. He winked at his fellow warriors and waved bye before disappearing from view. As he walked towards the kitchen his memory flashed back towards that

night, the sudden pain of being shot, the rage of the state of his inescapable death, and then the shock of seeing the small body standing in front of him, protecting him. The frail body falling to the ground- Okita shoved open the kitchen door just a bit too hard, as his anger and irritation soared.

Minutes later he slid open the door to Chizuru's room, smiling. "Ohaiyo, Chizuru-chan." He said softly sliding the door closed. Large brown eyes looked at him and he stopped of a moment in complete surprise at what he saw. This was not Chizuru, her eyes held to much fatigue and her face was thin. Her hair was wet and served no other purpose than to highlight the paleness of her face.

"Ohaiyo, Okita-san.." Her voice wavered in its whisper and slowly fell to silence.

"You bathed?" He asked, sitting beside her head, laying the tray on his left. A weak nod was his answer and he silently tried to force his body to relax. It would do neither of them good if he lost his temper.

"Good. Now it's time to eat." Chizuru's eyes locked onto his, and he stopped the protest that was coming, knowing all too well what it was she was going to say, "If you don't eat, I'll kill you."

A faint smile sent his way was far more reassuring than he thought it ought to be, and Okita quickly cast the feeling aside as he reached down and helped her sit up. Her eyes never once looked at him, as he came to the realization that it was all the girl could do just to sit up. "Sa, open up." He held the spoon to her lips and obediently she sipped the soup. It went that way for a while until her body could hold her up no longer and Okita quickly managed to catch her before she hit the futon.

"Really Chizuru you ought to stop all this falling into my arms." He said laughing. With relished delight he watched her face flush a little, and something in his heart eased at that prevalent sign of emotion.

"Gomenasai." The girl whispered as she was laid back down and carefully tucked in. Her eyes struggled to stay open and Okita smirked down at her, "Sleep Chizuru-chan, or-"

"I don't want to." Her whisper held fear, and Okita's usual smile fell away at such a rare sign of disobedience from the girl.

"Heh? Why not?"

Her wide eyes told him everything and he sighed, and held her hand, "Don't worry, you'll wake up. Now sleep or I really will kill you."

For the rest of the afternoon that was where the demon sat, watching the woman sleep as her delicate hand tightly clasped in his own. At some point as the sun set his eyes must have closed, because when Kondou-san peeked in at dinner he found the younger man asleep on the floor, curled next to Chizuru. The oldest of the Shinsengumi smiled and took off his over coat and laid it on the man's body, silently scolding the boy for not having worn anything thicker. Slipping out of the room with one last look and a smile, the man informed Saito to

make enough food for those still awake.

That night a soft wind blew the snow stuck in trees to the ground and the flakes landed softly after a slow waltz through the late night sky. Dawn rose earlier than yesterday, peering through empty branches to smile brightly down on one of the nation's biggest cities. Okita scowled to himself as light invaded his sleep and he wiggled closer to the warm sheets that were around him.

What felt like moments later his world began to shake and he wondered what it was that Kashima got distracted by, so much so that he released Onamazu, 'cause once he found that thing Okita decided he was going to slaughter it.

"Mister. It's time to get up." A small voice called as the shaking stopped for a moment. Okita grumbled and swatted his hand in the direction of the high voice, too tired to play with the local kids now. Onamazu started shaking the earth once again and Okita's eyes snapped open, realizing it wasn't the earth, but rather it was him. The sound of a sigh and the light thump of child's feet on the floor welcomed his ears. Automatically his hand reached for his sword and with a quick tug and an elegant movement he was standing, his katana drawn and pointed in at the back of the head of a child who was no more than six years of age.

It was at the door, but out of some reflex the child had turned and came face to face with the very dangerous weapon. He had to admit the kiddo had guts the way he looked at the weapon that could so easily end his life with such a sense of wonder. Large eyes looked up to meet the gaze of the man that held their life in hand, and said man nearly dropped his weapon in shock. He knew those eyes!

"Don't move." He said warningly and turned around to look at the futon where there was supposed to be a sleeping Chizuru. Only there wasn't. Something tugged at his heart and the man tossed aside the empty blankets until at last he was certain that there was no Chizuru hiding under the covers or anywhere in the room.

"What are you looking for mister?" The boy's voice brought him from despair and Okita looked down at the child with such a look that would frighten anyone. Those large eyes looked up at him, blinking curiously, as though unaffected by the dark look that was being bestowed on him. Those eyes- where on earth had he seen them? Okita shook away the thought and grabbed the boy who yelped in surprise. Ignoring the child's protests as he slung him over his shoulder the swordsman walked out of the room, heading to the dining hall where everyone ought to be gathered for the morning meal.

"Ah! Souji! Ohaiyo!" The warm smile of Kondou-san's was enough to make the young man relax slightly, before the wiggling thing on his shoulder caught the attention of everyone in the room. Hijikata frowned, and the others looked simply puzzled.

"Neh- Okita-san, why do you have a kid on your shoulder?" Heisuke asked, momentarily forgetting about his daily food struggle with Shinpachi, who too had forgotten in lieu of the person standing at the door looking irritated and almost worried.

"Chizuru-chan is gone- I found this kid in her room." Okita plopped the boy down, letting his fellow captains look at the child. The

response took a moment at everyone seemed to intake the sudden and roughly presented information.

"WHAT!"

Okita grimaced and conveyed through concise words what had happened in the night, leaving out only the fact that he had held onto their charge's hand for most of the evening- he had a reputation to uphold, at least in front of Shimpachi and Heisuke.

Kondou-san thought for a moment, trading glances with Hijikata before looking towards the child, a kind and warm smile on his face. Absentmindedly Okita wondered why it was that Kondou had never had children of his own- he would be a great fatherâ€¦ Pushing back the thought easily, Okita silently began eating as he laid careful eyes on the child, who now seemed somewhat cowed by the men and the tense atmosphere.

"Ohaiyo. I'm Kondou. I have a few questions that are very important- can you answer them please?"

The child nodded, looking around nervously as he clasped his hands together tightly- yet another thing Okita found incredibly familiar. Damn it all- why couldn't he place it?

"What's your name child?"

"Yukimura Chizuru. It's nice to meet you." The child murmured, bowing in a cute sort of way.

Silence fell on the gathered group and wide eyes placed on disbelieving faces. There was no way- absolutely none. Ever the resolute man, Kondou-san continued smiling and asking his questions, although the tension in his shoulders and posture told the truth of the matter.

"How old are you Chizuru-chan?"

"6."

Glances moved back and forth either from one of the other Shinsengumi or to the child. Even Saito seemed tense and uncertain, although he tried to hide it. However Okita's eyes were sharp, even if his sense of taste was dim. He had spent years with these men, had observed them, fought them, trained with them, and even shed blood with them beside him. There was very little he did not know about any of the men here.

"Wow that very old." Kondou-san said in an approving tone.

The girl- Chizuru's face brightened considerably at the complement and she sat a little straighter, eager to be recognized by anyone as something other than a helpless child who knew nothing of the world. As she did so it seemed as though all worry left her, she smiled openly at the Chief, and Okita had to suppress a chuckle at the child's antics, easily his face reconstructed as his mind returned to the problem at hand. There as simply no way that that was Chizuru, the polite, shy, tease able girl from Edo. This child simply could not be her.

"Chizuru-chan how did you manage to get into the room?" Kondou-san asked gently.

The six year old looked at him, clearly puzzled and confused but answered anyhow, "I went to bed in there and woke up in there. Isn't that where I was supposed to be?" Her large eyes looked up at the various men, wondering if she had done something wrong, something bad. She hadn't thought so; going to sleep in your own room wasn't a crime- at least not one that she knew of.

"Yamazaki." Hijikata called lowly, his voice barely enough for the entire room to hear.

"Hai, Hijikata-san?" An equally low voice answered as a young man walked out from the shadows of the room.

"Go and retrieve Dr. Mastumoto as fast as possible. Tell him it's an emergency."

"Hai." With that the green clad man rushed off sparing a brief but curious glance at the girl, which was returned equally before the sliding door close off all connection.

Kondou-san asked many more questions, many kindly meant and received and replied to with the openness only a child could give. Soon the girl was eating with them, although she sat in plain view and slightly away from the others. By this time she had been introduced to each of the men in the room, and had politely murmured the words one would say at a first meeting. The girl exclaimed over the food, declaring it delicious much to the joy of Heisuke and Nagakura.

"Where are your parents?" It was a question they all knew the answer to, and thus all of the captains were surprised by the answer that they received from the child who had noticeably stiffened.

"Gone." The answer was short, concise, and empty- there was no emotion, no hint of sadness, or loneliness. It was a reply that was almost like Saito or Hijikata, precise and to the point without emotion clouding the word. Her reply was a single word that sent all eyes back to the small figure, whose eyes had dimmed and the light from her smile faded as she looked at them with a blank face.

Kondou-san frowned as Okita's eyes snapped towards the girl; she had never said that before. Now Okita never really considered himself great, except in three ways, the first and foremost being his sword work, the second being his ability to hide his true feelings, and third- in his ability to read others. So far nothing the girl had said had been untruthful, in fact it had been so completely honest that Okita had wanted to turn away from her. The pure goodness that practically rolled off this tiny human being was more than he could handle. Now though, now there was something about her that made him want to never look away- to figure out what it was that shadowed this child's brightness and warmth and then destroy it completely.

"I'm sorry" Kondou-san offered tentatively.

The child nodded and quietly ate after and almost unheard thanks. The discomfort that invaded the dining hall was different this time, and

it made the grown men uncertain of both themselves and uncertain of how to act. None of them were quite certain what to do with the child so they did nothing, sitting there in unease until, about ten minutes later, Yamazaki returned with a pale faced doctor on his heels.

"What's the matter? Is Yukimura-?" His voice was sharp and so full of worry.

The girl, completely unseen by the man leapt to her feet and rushed forwards with a cry of delight. "Masu-jiii!"

The shaved headed man blinked in complete shock as the familiar figure of a six year old Chizuru latched itself onto his leg, crowing delightedly at his arrival. He looked at the Shinsengumi captains and then down at the child then back up, and a slow sigh escaped his lips. This was going to be a long day.

An hour later, Okita, Hijikata, Kondou, and Saito sat on the hall watching as Heisuke, Harada, and Shinpachi played ball with the young Chizuru. Dr. Mastumoto had confirmed that she was indeed the real Yukimura Chizuru, and while he had been confused as to what had taken place in the night he was evidently relieved that she was alive. The doctor had declared her perfectly healthy and had said that he would try and do some research about what could have caused a physical regression of the body; leaving the young Chizuru in the care of the warriors.

Okita watched the scene that played out before him and the leading commanders, a small indulgent smile on his face. While everyone was still responsible for the child, Sannan had said, before he retreated to his dark room away from the bright morning, technically Okita was the one who ought to have most of the responsibility, since it was he who had been charged with the upkeep of her health before this unforeseen turn of events.

In the end, Okita thought as he watched the laughing child, it would seem as though he would get to play a role he had thought he had escaped from.

"Souji, are you sure you're okay with all of this?" Kondou-san asked, warm eyes turning towards him in concern. Okita smiled truly at the man he admired most and nodded.

"Ah. Don't worry Kondou-san, I won't kill her."

Out of his eye Okita thought he saw Hijikata sighed and murmur the word 'yet' under his breath. Souji allowed his normal smiling expression slip back into place and he turned his head to watch as Chizuru tackled Heisuke, catching to older boy off-guard, as she played vigorously. Save for some small habits he had picked up and her eyes, large and expressive as they were, Okita could hardly bring himself to believe that the girl playing in front of them was Chizuru. It made the man wonder what had happened in her life to change such a free spirited girl into the young woman the Shinsengumi had come to know and care for.

It wasn't long before the three adult playmates claimed tiredness from the rather intense ball game and made their way to sit by their friends and allies as the young one began to look around the open

courtyard. Thankfully there was no worry about the child wandering and getting into trouble, as the garden was enclosed and walled off with thick stones. It had been a place for the captains to come and enjoy temporary peace and a place to drink, talk, and relax whenever the weather permitted. Once Chizuru had come into their lives, the garden had become neater and tended, flourishing under gently feminine hands and tender care that none of the men had time to give to the plants and trees. Souji recalled many times how he had caught her singing softly as she washed clothes or swept, or just sat on this very spot.

A pang of something hit his heart hard enough to make the swordsman want to grab to area above the organ and cry out; but he had control and managed to keep his bodily instincts in check. As quick as it had come the pang, passed away, leaving a very quiet and ponderous man in its wake. For a while short while he focused on the tactics conversation being held, adding in his own two cents every now and then, whether requested or not.

"Ano, Souji?" Heisuke's voice with its slight under toned of concern caught his attention. He looked over to the younger man in askance. The long brown haired warrior flicked his blue eyes over to the garden before he turned back to the conversation. It was discreet and for that, Okita was grateful. Green eyes lazily cast around the courtyard only to widen when he realized that the young girl had vanished. Casually Okita stood, and slipped on his outdoor sandals and began to walked around the small garden at a leisurely pace. Suddenly something thunked him in the head and a small cry of mixed surprise and pain escaped his lips as his hands automatically went to the top of his head. Eyes flicked to the ground then upwards into the empty sakura tree as a giggle was heard from above.

"Chizuru-chan!" He called up, a familiar teasing and playful edge to his voice. "You ought to come down from there."

The child laughed at him and the grown man lost all the patience he had intended on using to get the child to return herself to the ground. With a low growl the man grabbed a branch and with a few slips and twist he inelegantly climbed the tree. It took him longer than it had taken the younger human but then again it had been years since he had actually climb into the branches like some loony animal. Soon he was on the same branch at Chizuru and looked down at her with a smirk of triumph on his face. "Didn't think I could do it, did yah?" He grinned.

Chizuru had an honest expression that was a mix of chagrin and sheepishness on her face and Okita knew he had been right. He found himself smirking, knowing that in many ways the child didn't know who she was challenging and that in most ways he was likely better than a six year old could ever be.

"No!" She grumbled, her voice easily giving away the lie. Okita smiled finding yet another similar feature between the old Chizuru and the young. Neither could lie with ease or precision. His grin in response to that mental notice was a small smile that was full of confidence and something else that the six year old could not interpret. "Mah, ja matta." He said, and easily clambered down the tree branches until he was once again on the flat ground with both feet firmly planted on the ground. Brown eyes watched the auburn haired man as he walked back over and deftly slammed a bunch of snow

he had gathered into the face of the severe looking man with the really nice hair- Hijikata, her mind recalled. Warm laughter and cheers echoed across the snow filled garden as an all-out snow war broke out between the men.

Chizuru giggled, and her eyes caught the young Heisuke trying to sneak around her tree in order to get behind Okita and toss his own snowball at the auburn haired man. She looked towards said man, only to find him distracted by the tall red haired man and the messy brown haired man. The knowing glint in their eyes gave it all away and Chizuru grinned mischievously, sneaking quietly down the tree to a particularly thick, snow covered branch. She waited until the long haired boy was directly under her.

Souji heard Heisuke's cry and turned around only to see the boy drowned in a sudden fall of snow. Green eyes looked up and he grinned at the smug look that was across the face of a young girl. The other Shinsengumi broke into laughter, the snow war completely forgotten, as they displayed their merriment at their youngest member's defeat at the hands of a youngster. Okita walked back to the tree and held out his arms, "Jump Chizuru." He called upwards, ready to catch the child. In all honesty he was surprised by the readiness in which she obeyed his smiling command. Almost immediately she jumped, not even pausing to think about the man's trustworthiness. Laughing Okita caught the girl, and swung her around letting her weight and momentum to carry the circle. Little did the man or child know, fond smiles were etched on the faces of the watching men.

"Oh, what's this Kondou-san, do we have children now instead of men?" Gen-san asked, stopping his search for his leader. A warm smile was stretched across his thing face, it was indulgent as he watched the men come tromping back to the hall, covered in grins and snow. Bright red faces and laughing eyes greeted the elder man and many of the men grinned in answer to the man's suggestion. Kondou-san smiled up at him, the only soul who had no snow on him as he had decided to sit and watch.

"I think we just might, Gen-san. Looks like we might have to go out and search for more men, ours seem to be stuck in the midst of childhood." Kondou-san's words were filled with ease and warmth- displaying his affection openly and without regret.

Genzaburo Inoue smiled and walked off, declaring that he'd make some tea. Kondou-san called after his thanks then turned back his gaze to the sight before him. Okita, at some point had slipped on a hidden patch of ice and had landed in the snow. Chizuru lay beside the grown man while the others rushed over, calling out their concerns. Kondou-san was about to get up and walk over to the young man who was like a son to him, only to relax when he hear to joint laughter of child and man.

Okita silently led the young Chizuru into the bathing house, holding her hand as she followed him smiling. Her small hand fit well into his sword roughened hands, he noticed, and somewhere in his mind he seemed to like the warm open gaze that she bestowed on him. If he was being honest with himself, he liked the idea of her admiring him rather than fearing him, as her older self did.

"Nah, Chizuru-chan are you ready to bath?" He asked warmly.

"Do I have to get a hair wash?" Her voice was plaintive.

Okita let out a short laugh and nodded, "Hai~ Your hair is smelly after all our running around"

Her silence was pouting and Okita chuckled to himself, before sliding open the door to the large bathing area. Already some of the others were in the bathing pool, which was about chest deep. Sneaking a look at Chizuru Okita smirked on seeing her very happy- if somewhat uncertain face. A soft chuckle escaped his mouth and Okita easily slipped out of his clothes and slipped into the warm water. He turned and held out his arms to the child who had a small towel around her. Hesitantly she stepped into the water and quickly grabbed his arms with a surprisingly tight grip. Okita blinked in surprise as her tiny body trembled.

"Heh? What's the matter Chi-zu-ru-chan?" He asked, smiling with his eyes closed.

"I-I can't swim." Her voice was small, scared and Okita's eyes blinked open in surprise before another smile made its way across his face,

"Then maybe it's time for you to learn."

Wide brown eye looked at him and the man's mind stuttered to a halt at the frightened look that filled the child's face. She shook her head, sending the dry strands flying around her head like a mini halo. The denial was so strong that the idea gave way and instinctively his grip tightened on the child.

"Alright." He murmured lowly, trying to reassure to small creature. "Daijobou, I won't let you go." Bright eyes looked up at him, filled by a warm smile before the child nodded and laid her head in the crook of his neck.

"I trust you Souji."

For a brief moment in time the world just stopped, as the shocked man heard his given name uttered so sweetly and trustingly. The only other person who had ever done so was Kondou-san, even his sister had never uttered his name quite like that before. A small smile came to his lips and oh so gently, Okita held the small girl as he waded deeper into the pool, until they were in the deepest parts of the water. As the water had crawled slowly upwards, eventually reach Chizuru's chest Okita notice that her grip was quite strong.

"CHIZURU?" Heisuke cried out in confusion, his face red as he realized that the young child was clinging tightly to Souji's neck. Okita wanted to roll his eyes at the boy and barely refrained from doing so.

"She is only six, Heisuke. It's not like she wants to look at you." He said, smirking as Heisuke's face reddened even further. The young man's mouth shut tightly even as the men around him, namely Shinpachi and Sano, grinned and teased him. Okita looked around, noticing that no one of the others looked at the act strangely for more than a few seconds, before turning back to what they had been doing beforehand. For everyone that meant returning to their sake cups and the bottle

that was being passed around, as well as a return to the happy conversation that had been loud and warm previously.

"Nah, Chizuru-chan, what do you think? Don't worry I won't let you go." When the child did move her head away from his neck Okita sighed and gently tugged the hair she had piled on her head in a sloppy bun. "Chi-zu-ru, sit up or I'll decide to drop you."

It was a low blow but it got the results that he wanted. Slowly Chizuru sat up, and although her hands were still tight around his neck, her eyes wandered around in the enclosed bathhouse. Her body stopped trembling as she gradually looked around, her wide brown eyes curious. Heisuke swam/waded over a strange, somewhat awkward expression on his face. At first he started up a conversation and then, all hell broke loose.

3. Harada Side Part 1

Sorry to my readers who have been waiting for updates. Thank you so much for reading and I hope you all enjoy

P.S: Okita fans- DO NOT KILL ME- even though I am slightly guilty for antagonizing you, because I enjoy it. ;)

Enjoy my extremely late update, please read and review.

* * *

><p>Sanosuke Harada Side Part 1

****Chapter Two- In which Harada discovers his Truth ****

Harada gazed calmly about the dining room gauging the various reactions of his fellow captains as he showed them his tiny straw. Hijikata drew a breath and let it out and Harada surmised that his sigh was relieved now that the childish arguments that Sannan-san had stopped earlier were going to completely end- at least until the Doctor returned in a few days. Kondou-san was grinning happily, almost like a child as he instructed Harada to do his best- to which the red haired man smiled and nodded. Shinpachi and Heisuke were grumbling, nearly identical pouts etched on their faces as they sat with their arms over their chests. They were always so childish, he thought smiling to himself.

"Well, then I had better be off, Chizuru-chan needs a real man to look after her." The light hearted jibe got just the reactions that he wanted as Shinpachi and Heisuke stood up with indignant cries and Okita and the others merely laughed. Sliding the screen door behind him Harada walked down the open hallway only to pause when the wavering light of the moon peered leaked from behind the clouded sky, making the layered snow glimmer like a jewel. Briefly, a splash of red seemed to smother the silent image before disappearing as soon as it had come; a memory and nothing more. Amber eyes narrowed slightly, though his face gave nothing away.

With a deep sigh Harada continued on his way until he reached her room. As silently as he could the spear wielding warrior entered and then slid the door closed. Flickering candles spread a dim light throughout the room, giving him just enough light to see Chizuru,

looking terribly pale and small lying amidst all the blankets that covered her body. Sitting beside her bed, Harada began to pour some sake into the small cup that accompanied the thin bottle. He needed to relax but be aware of the movement of the woman and while it would take about a dozen or more bottles to make his awareness become skewed, a single bottle would at least help ease the tension that had gathered in his body.

"I never really noticed it beforehand, but the world feels so still without you being around. It probably because we've gotten so used to you being here that anytime where you're not around feels wrong." He said his voice soft. "I'm not sure if you this, but what you did was brave Chizuru. Stupid and rash, but very brave. When you wake up I'm sure everyone will tell you not to ever do something so stupid again." Thank you, though, for saving Okita. We owe you one."

Unbidden silence passed through the rest of the night, save for the occasional soft clink of the cup coming into contact with the sake bottle. Amber eyes never left her face, an unnamed fear keeping them opened until they would stay open no longer. Sleep swept the unwilling Harada away until the light of the morning crept through the cobwebs of unconsciousness. Remembering his duties amber orbs jerked open and locked onto his still sleeping charge. Her chest was still and eyes widened in fear as a shaky hand reached out to touch the small hand that had helped support the Shinsengumi for nearly a year. His mind couldn't stop functioning as he reached for Chizuru, what would he tell the others? How could she die? As though his touch was the key, her chest rose and she breathed and as she did so Harada let out his own withheld breath. It was then that he realized something important, and the knowledge was immediately recognized for fact and Sanosuke Harada, locked it away in his mind- he could not bear to see her die, or even think of her being dead a second time. It was a thought that shook the red haired warrior and for many moments he stopped and pondered on it.

A soft groan reached his ears and Harada looked over in joy seeing Chizuru's face scrunch up in denial before her eyes slowly opened. "Ohaiyo, Chizuru-chan. I'm glad to see you're finally awake."

Large brown eyes looked at him, following the side way turn of her head as she searched for his voice. As the large and familiar brown orbs locked onto him, a frown slid onto her pale face furrowing her brow, "Ano. Who are you?" Her voice was small and timid and her eyes held within a trace of something he had not seen in them in a long time. Fear.

Oblivious to the pain her words caused him, her voice continued the pitch rising slightly as she grew more concerned and frightened, "Where am I? Why am I not home? Where's father?"

Seeing her struggle to sit up, Sano quickly reached out and gently touched her shoulder, pressing her back down onto the futon, "Careful. You're injured."

Her eyes looked at him wide before she looked away from him, "Please, don't hurt me." Her voice shook as though she was about to cry.

Sano froze, hearing the threatening tears in her voice. Struggling

against the words that felt like physical wounds Sano smiled gently. "It's alright, Chizuru. I'm not going to hurt you, nor will anyone else."

Eyes locked and then quickly she looked away, "How do you know my name..?"

Sano swallowed, fighting valiantly against the emotions that welled within, "Rest. I will call the doctor for you and bring some food. Are you hungry?"

Even though she shook her head, her large eyes and growling stomach told the truth and with a softly laugh and smile Sano got up and walked out of the room. After closing the door Harada stumbled to the nearest wall and leaned heavily against it. She didn't remember them- didn't remember him! Certainly he was relieved that she was alive, but that she had no memory of anything that had happened was painful. Taking a few deep breaths Sano went to the kitchen and grabbed the warm bowl of broth and a spoon, before striding back to Chizuru's room. Announcing his presence before he entered, Sano was glad to see that she had stayed where he had left her.

"I brought you breakfast- once the doctor says it's alright I'll bring you something that tastes a little better." Sano said softly, knowing that if he said things in any other way, she would grow fearful of him.

Her thanks were soft and he watched as she struggled to eat, before reaching out. Chizuru's eyes jumped to his face as his large hands took the bowl from her grasp and placed it on the floor before leaving, only to come back moments later with a small cup. She watched as he poured the broth into the cup and handed it back to her. "That should make things a little easier." He said with a small smile.

Again she thanked him, but in a voice that was a little less timid. Every time she finished a cup, he would take it and refill it, until she claimed she was full. Eyeing her carefully Harada noted the brightness in her eyes and the warmth in her cheeks and smiled. "You ate well."

"It was very tasty." She replied, a little unnerved by how pleased he sounded. She looked at him before asking, "What's your name?"

"Harada Sanosuke, you can call me Sano though- everyone else here does." He had made the same offer once before, not half as genuinely as he did this time. The warrior watched her with assessing eyes, looking at her with care and searching for signs that his name meant something to her- but, to his dismay, her eyes did not show familiarity at the name.

"You're in Kyoto, at the Shinsengumi headquarters." He continued, eyeing her carefully looking for the faintest trace of her memory returning, but nothing he'd told her brought anything other than surprise.

"Eh? Kyoto!" Harada found he did not care for that flash of fear in her eyes, when he said the name of their group.

"You travelled here from Edo about a year ago to search for your father and because we need to find him too, you've been living here under our protection since then. Does that answer all your questions?" He asked.

Chizuru looked quite shaken and worry pierced through the warrior at how quickly she paled, her face going from a healthy pink to a ghostly white. Leaping forward he caught her as she swayed dangerously, "Gomen, Chizuru-chan, looks like I said too much. Rest now and I will go get the doctor."

Soon Harada was back in the common dining area with the rest of the Captains, waiting at Doctor Matsumoto examined his patient. Thankfully the other captains were busy this day and had not seen him leave the manor only to come back with the Doctor in tow. What was probably only an hour felt like a whole day by the time Doctor Matsumoto was in the room drinking tea and telling the spear toting warrior about Chizuru.

"She's sleeping now, but you'll be glad to hear that she is recovering and out of danger for the time being. Her body will be weak for a time Harada-san, but she will be fine so long as she is not overly exposed to the cold."

Harada nodded calmly as he waited for the man to continue, waiting for the largest part of his concern.

"Now then, about her memory- I have had many patients lose memories after accidents, and for the most part they all recovered them with time, so you may rest easy on that account. However," The bald doctor's face turned severe, "you gave her too much information at one time- at this point in her recovery too much information can set her back again. If you ever do such a thing again, be careful about what it is you give her and keep it limited."

"What about the others?"

Matsumoto paused for a moment thinking, for it was a smart question. Chizuru had many people here worried for her, but meeting too many people who claimed to know her could cause some troubles that should be avoided if possible.

"Perhaps she needs to be reintroduced one at a time and over a span of weeks." He replied to Sano slowly. "But she must have one person she knows around- always."

Harada's thought filled eyes were guarded, his face masked to a neutral expression. For a moment the doctor watched, wondering why it was that the man was not some sort of politician- even though he seemed to be silly and thoughtless, his knowing gaze gave away his quick thinking mind, but not the deep thoughts that he kept hidden at all times.

"I think it best if you remain near her, Harada-san. She knows you now and appears to trust to some degree. Besides, you are not apt to spoil her or tease her or lose your temper or be too rambunctious."

"Saito is that way."

"Indeed, but he also says very little. Chizuru-chan will need someone who she can have a conversation with but who will not get her spirits too high up. She needs to stay as relaxed as possible, and quite frankly you are the only one who can offer that. Although, perhaps Saito-san would be a good person to introduce her to first or maybe Kondou-san."

For the few remaining hours of the morning the two men sat and talked, carefully laying down plans and possible treatments for Chizuru's memory and what to do if certain things happened. Eventually the pair split, doctor left to go visit other patients promising to return to the house in a few days to make certain that Chizuru was making good progress, and after seeing the man out, Sano returned to the napping Chizuru's side. She ate dinner in silence and Harada let her, knowing that she needed time to sort through all the things he had told her this morning. Once she finished he helped her to the bathroom so that she could wash and relieve herself, before he helped her back to bed. The toll of her slow and unsteady walk must have been great for she was asleep almost as soon as her head hit the pillow. For a short while Harada sat beside her humming a slow lullaby that he vaguely recalled from a distant childhood, before at last leaving the room to attend dinner and update the others.

Needless to say the food waiting for him was not as tasty as Chizuru's food, but it was edible though spicy, which indicated that Okita had cooked. The others watched Harada, noting the deep weariness that emanated from the man. At last he finished and noted the gazes of the rest. Smiling he informed them that she was awake and healing, which brought relieved looks and smiles all around.

"Did she ask about us?" Shinpachi asked, "I bet you she did- probably about Souji first."

Okita's hands grasped the katana that rested against his shoulder at the reminder, but covered up his unease with a smug smirk. Harada made a mental note to try and check Shinpachi's careless remarks- not missing a single thing about the auburn haired man who he had fought alongside for years.

"Actually no- she didn't ask about anyone." Harada replied, looking down at his cup of sake before downing it in a big gulp. The cup was placed down so gently that the others' looks sharpened, zeroing in on his face and its expressions. Unbidden Harada answered the silent question that hung in the air, his voice level, "She doesn't remember us." She doesn't remember anything from the past year and a half."

Gasps and frowns greeted his statement, but Harada continued onwards knowing wanting to get this over with and get back to Chizuru's quiet presence, which had always eased his agitated spirits in the past. "To her, her father had been gone for little over a month and has written to her frequently. The doctor says it's normal but that she shouldn't see too many people to know her at once."

Following that statement he continued on with telling them about what had been discussed between him and the doctor, telling the other Captains about the plan to get Chizuru used to being in Kyoto and getting her memory back. By the end of his statement the only ones disliking the plans were Heisuke and Shinpachi, the last two people

who were allowed to meet Chizuru. Good naturedly Harada teased them, trying to lighten the mood but still keep it serious. An hour later, after being updated about patrol routes and the happenings of the city Harada departed the candle lit room to return to Chizuru's quarters.

To his surprise he found the young woman sitting up her eyes wide and fearful. "What's the matter?" He asked concerned, after looking around to room to see naught but shadows.

"Harada-san!" Her voice sounded so relieved even as she pushed forwards to hug in tightly, her small frame shaking. Caught off guard Sano stumbled back, before holding her gently, murmuring soft reassurances to her until she seemed to calm. After resettling her in her futon he looked at her in askance. Her pale face turned a dark pink in a flush of embarrassment, "Iâ€|dreamt of something awful."

Gently he urged her to speak and what he heard made his blood run cold but made his mind relieved, "There were these things- monsters with white hair and red eyes. They- they killed a group of menâ€|their laughterâ€|the bloodâ€|!" Her evident distress grew with each word until Harada gently shushed her voice.

"It was just a nightmare Chizuru-chan." He said reassuringly and mentally wished that were true. How much less would their problem be! Slowly the girl calmed down enough to willingly climb back into bed, but even when lying down with a candle lit to drive away the darkness of the night she refused to let go of his hand, which brought her an unexplainable reassurance.

The week passed, with Sano dining in the evening with the rest of the Shinsengumi taichous and then sleeping besides Chizuru at night and then eating breakfast with her early in the morning. The long days and afternoons were spent regaling her with heroic tales from old stories or even stories of his adventures from childhood and during his early years of training. Whenever the captains just 'happened' to walk by her room they were always pleased to hear something from the girl, be it her soft giggle or her voice. Soon the doctor cleared her for a little exercise during the day, though warned Sano of being gentle with where he led the girl. Afterwards the man had immediately taken the girl out to the garden and showed her the snow. He left her briefly to get a hot cup of tea for her, and on his return he discovered a small rabbit made of snow sitting on the walkway. "I remember someone teaching me how to make these." Chizuru said softly, her face a healthy pink from the bite of the cold air.

Harada grinned happily, knowing that it was he who had taught her how to make them, when she hadn't been allowed to leave headquarters during the first month or so of her arrival. Handing her the cup Sanosuke watched her carefully, sitting back in his usual relaxed posture.

"Nah, Chizuru. What do you say to meeting a friend of mine?" He asked, making certain to phrase his question very carefully.

Chizuru looked pensively down at her tea before her soft voice reach his ears, "Isâ€|it another person I've forgotten?"

Harada nodded, "Yes, but don't worry about it. Your memories will

return in time."

Chizuru's uncertain face made his own soften and carefully he reached out and laid his hand on the top of her head, "I promise you- they will come back and I will help you until your remember everything."

Her returning smile was worth every pain he had taken in the past week to see to her comfort and for many long minuets the warrior and the girl sat quietly beside one another, simply gazing at the snow each one feeling warm and hopeful in the company of the other.

End
file.